

Karen Stewart

Public-Private Partnership Saves Rail Corridors for Trail Use

Corridors like this one between Laramie, Wyoming and the Wyoming/Colorado state line have been successfully rail-banked due to an effective partnership between RTC and the Park Service's Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance program.

Thanks to an "early warning system" nearly 1,500 miles of rail corridors proposed for abandonment in the past year have been preserved and may be developed as public trails. The notification process, a joint effort of the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC) and the Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance program of the National Park Service, alerts communities to impending rail abandonments and encourages their conversion to trail use.

"In many cases, the early warning system is the only way that local officials and trail activists find out about proposed rail abandonments and opportunities for new trails. Without it, many of these rail corridors would be lost forever," said David Burwell, President of RTC.

Most abandonment regulations allow only 20 days for communities to express interest in acquiring a corridor for a trail and to request rail-banking. In the past year, RTC and RTCA have notified more than 1,000 community officials and activists of rail abandonments. Of the 1,920 miles proposed for abandonment (140 corridors), 1,450 miles (82 corridors) are now rail-trail projects.

Since RTCA was created in 1988, the two groups have worked together to provide assistance to communities working on rail-trail conversions. Joint projects have included a case-study evaluation of how local initiative and federal support launched the rails-to-trails movement, and a series of one-day instructional seminars conducted in 15 cities on how to create rail-trails in communities.

An agreement signed in May 1996 calls for short and long-term actions in several priority



areas, and is the cornerstone on which RTC and the Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance program will continue to build their relationship. "The RTC-RTCA collaboration is an excellent example of a government agency and a non-profit group working together to further opportunities for trails and greenways. We've been able to accomplish much more by working together," said Tom Ross, Program Manager for the National Park Service.

RTCA facilitates partnerships and planning for trails, greenways, river corridors, watersheds and heritage areas. RTCA staff have assisted more than 500 local projects and dozens of rail-trail conversions, including the 43-mile Youghiogheny River Trail in Pennsylvania and Utah's 30-mile Historic Union Pacific Rail Trail.

Karen Stewart is Communications Coordinator with the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, 1100 17th Street, NW; Washington, DC 20036; 202-331-9696.